

[HOME](#)[ABOUT](#)[GRANTS](#)[NEWS](#)[LIFETIME HONORS](#)[PUBLICATIONS](#)[ARTISTIC FIELDS](#)[CONTACT](#)[Home](#) » [Partnerships](#) » [Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network](#)

CREATIVE FORCES: NEA MILITARY HEALING ARTS NETWORK

Frequently Asked Questions



Photo by Jeremy Todd/NEA

What is Creative Forces?

Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network is a partnership among the National Endowment for the Arts, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and state arts agencies that serves the unique and special needs of military patients and veterans who have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions, as well as their families and caregivers. Creative Forces is made up of a network of caring people—clinicians, art therapists, artists, arts organization staff, and community members—who believe in the transformative and restorative powers of the arts.

There are three components to Creative Forces:

Clinical—Creative Forces places creative arts therapies at the core of patient-centered care at 11 medical treatment facilities located throughout the country, with a telehealth program for military patients in rural and remote areas. At the clinical sites, the NEA funds creative arts therapists who provide art and music therapy, and creative writing instruction, as well as equipment and supplies.

Community—Creative Forces is creating a community-based military and veteran family support network made up of state, regional, and local arts agencies, and other local partners around each clinical site location. The community network provides increased arts opportunities for military and veteran family populations and extends support for current and former creative arts therapies patients and their families as they transition from treatment in a clinical setting to arts programming in their community.

Capacity—Creative Forces is developing manuals, toolkits, and an online resource center to support best practices; providing training and technical support for community arts providers; funding innovation projects in each state that create a model project that can be adapted to other locations; and is investing in research on the biological, psycho-social, behavioral, and economic impacts of these arts-based interventions.

Who does Creative Forces reach?

In clinical settings, credentialed creative arts therapists work with military patients and veterans who have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions. In community settings, arts activities reach this same patient population, as well as veterans and military families.

Why the focus on creative arts therapy?

There is a growing need in our country to address TBI and PTSD. More than 500,000 men and women of our armed services are living with TBI or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including 10-20% of all service members deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. TBI and PTSD are known to contribute to depression, and to the estimated 20 suicides committed by veterans each day.

Participation in creative arts therapy or in community arts programs can help reduce stress, decrease anxiety, and increase positive emotions. In clinical and community settings, credentialed professionals, artists-in-residence, and other artists can help people improve their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.

Only half of veterans who need PTSD treatment seek it. Community-based arts programs can serve as a de-stigmatized access point for those who wish to learn about creative arts therapy in the clinical setting.

What is the feedback from patients and doctors on whether Creative Forces is beneficial?

Creative arts therapies increases patient engagement across all health interventions and is seen as critical by all members of the interdisciplinary care team because it helps the patient and their providers gain a clearer understanding of the conditions they are struggling to address. It literally makes these “invisible wounds” more visible. Patients also acknowledge improvement in sleep, memory, pain cognitive function, and the ability to confront emotional challenges. Family members who engage in creative arts therapies express similar benefits as well. Creative arts therapies are non-invasive and cost-effective medical treatments.

In a survey at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) Walter Reed Bethesda:

- 85% of military patients said art therapy was helpful to their healing
- military patients consistently rated art therapy among the top four treatments out of more than 40 health interventions offered

Program Evaluation of the music therapy program at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) Walter Reed Bethesda showed:

- 79% of military patients who attended one music therapy group requested follow-up music therapy sessions (group/family/spousal)
- Military patients endorsed that participation in music therapy sessions assisted with learning how to use instrument-playing as a positive alternative coping skill, understanding the ability of active music-making as a means to connect with others

Evidence-based arts treatments for PTSD and depression could save more than \$1,000 in healthcare costs per veteran, a total of \$1.7 billion.

What is telehealth?

For the Creative Forces program, the NEA is working with the Center for Arts in Medicine at the University of Florida, in partnership with the Rural Veterans TeleRehabilitation Initiative to provide creative arts therapies to patients in rural and remote areas. The Rural Veterans TeleRehabilitation Initiative is a program of the VA Office of Rural Health at the Malcom Randall Veterans Administration Medical Center in Gainesville. For those who have difficulty accessing a clinic, the program uses software similar to video conferencing to connect with patients in rural and remote areas.

For community-based arts programming, are you targeting veterans and military families separately? Will the programming be tailored to each audience?

The target audiences for community-based arts programs are family members of active duty military and veterans who are being treated in a clinical program, as well as other military and veteran populations living in the community who would like to participate. Each local program will be unique and will harness the assets in that community.

What is the health spectrum of the audiences for the community-based arts programs? Is there a selection process?

The arts programs in the community will be open to anyone who wishes to participate, including current and former Creative Forces patients from nearby medical treatment facilities. It's important to note that the community-based arts programs are not therapy, and the participating artists are not usually therapists. Community-based arts programs are an adjunct to clinical care.

Is the community-based arts programming intended to be recreational or therapeutic?

Community-based arts programming is intended to be recreational, with therapeutic benefits. But it is not therapy. Usually activities are led by an artist-in-residence or another type of arts provider. Creative arts therapies can only be provided by a professionally trained and credentialed creative arts therapist. For further information about creative arts therapist training and credentials please visit the website for the [National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Associations](#).

How do patients and community members access the different components of this program (both the clinical and community setting activities)? How does that work?

The community-based arts programs can help current and former patients continue to benefit from the arts beyond the clinical setting, so that healing arts practice becomes part of their daily life. To make this happen, in the medical treatment facility, a creative arts therapist will identify a patient who may benefit from a community-based arts program during and/or after treatment in the medical facility. The creative arts therapists will visit the area programs, open lines of communication, and help create opportunities to continue the beneficial arts engagement that was initiated during treatment. If the patient chooses, he/she may continue to participate in the community-based arts program on their own.

In the community-based arts program setting, the participants may come from a nearby medical treatment facility, or they could be local veterans, service members, or family members who discover the program on their own.

What is the budget for Creative Forces?

In fiscal year 2017, the National Endowment for the Arts budget for Creative Forces is \$2.6 million, which includes funding for creative arts therapists – including, but not limited to, art and music therapists, creative writing instructors – as well as equipment and supplies at each of the clinical sites, a telehealth program, research on the impacts and benefits of these innovative treatment methods, and the development of a digital toolkit to support delivery of high-quality creative arts therapies in clinical settings and to support efforts to expand access to arts programming in community settings. It also includes \$350,000 that the NEA is making available to local community networks to support summits and innovation projects.

The Department of Defense provides the treatment space and patient referrals, in some cases funds additional creative arts therapists, and is a partner on research associated with Creative Forces.

What is the NEA's partnership history with the Department of Defense?

The NEA's partnership with the Department of Defense reaches back to 2004 when **Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience** was created by the NEA to help U.S. troops and their families write about their wartime experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and stateside.

From 2004-2006, Operation Homecoming provided more than 60 writing workshops to troops and their families at more than 30 military installations in the U.S. and overseas, from Camp Pendleton in California to Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan. Workshop leaders included distinguished authors, including Tom Clancy, and Bobbie Ann Mason. A later phase brought writing workshops to veterans and active duty troops at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, military hospitals, and affiliated centers in communities around the country. More than 6,000 people participated in Operation Homecoming workshops and related activities.

In 2011, the NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership was launched when the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) Walter Reed Bethesda invited the NEA to help build out its creative arts therapy program. In 2012, the Operation Homecoming writing workshops became part of the formal medical protocol at NICoE. After successfully piloting the NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership there, the NICoE Intrepid Spirit-1 at Fort Belvoir in Virginia invited the NEA to replicate the program in their new integrative care facility. The NICoE's groundbreaking, interdisciplinary approach to working with patients and their families became the model for the expanded healing arts partnership, which ranges from physical and neurological exams, to family evaluation, nutrition, alternative medicine, and art therapy. The partnership involved support for multiple creative arts therapies (therapeutic writing, art therapy, and music therapy) at Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir.

In 2016, the NEA expanded the NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership and launched Creative Forces.

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